<Book Reviews>Saigon's Edge: On the Margins of Ho Chi Minh City ERIK HARMS Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, xiv+294p.

AUTHOR(S):

Dror, Olga

Stoler, Ann Laura. 2002. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Thornton, Arland. 2005. *Reading History Sideways: The Fallacy and Enduring Impact of the Developmental Paradigm on Family Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Saigon's Edge: On the Margins of Ho Chi Minh City

ERIK HARMS

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, xiv+294p.

In his introduction to the book, Erik Harms states that there are no Vietnamese poems about Hóc Môn, a district lying on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City, one of its five outer-city districts. Perhaps this statement was true when Harms was conducting his research there at the beginning of the 2000s and when he was writing this book. But the appearance of this book has changed the situation—in Harms, Hóc Môn found its own poet, as his book, even if written in prose, is nothing short of a poem of appreciation if not of this industrializing area then of its inhabitants.

To be sure, it is a sophisticated and complicated prose poem, not an easy afternoon read. The book is firmly grounded into anthropological and sociological theories: spatial-temporal considerations, analyses of edginess, conflations and confrontations of rural and urban, dichotomies of kinship. It thoroughly considers the relationship between idealized myth-making and practical reality.

The book consists of three parts with each part subdivided into two chapters. The first chapter delineates the historical-sociological framework of the primary binary distinctions between inner city and outer city, the city and the countryside. They are not only in opposition to each other but also complement each other—their mutual interdependence seems to be inevitable as without one the other cannot exist, cannot even be identified. Harms skillfully analyzes trajectories that influence the development of each space and the changes produced by their proximity, reaching the conclusion that the outer city, regardless of this proximity and these changes, persists in maintaining its own identity.

Chapter Two explores the reasons for this persistence: economy, culture, upbringing, opportunities or lack thereof, and—perhaps most importantly—power are the factors that perpetuate the distinctions between urban and rural, inner city and outer city, Ho Chi Minh City and Hóc Môn. Disparity between the center and the margins has a dual effect on the latter: some people get depressed by what they perceive as their inevitably inferior position, while in others the disparity generates creative forces as well as the desire and ability to overcome invisible but firmly established borders.

In Chapter Three Harms considers temporal changes in the material landscape of Hóc Môn

and in the perception of Hóc Môn by its insiders. He examines the ideas of real time, social time, universal time, and "Party time" (the Communist Party's interpretation of temporal changes and its own role in them). Harms argues that even though the Party sees and presents itself as an engine unfailingly moving Ho Chi Minh City and its suburbs towards their successes and the development of socialism, it does not necessarily interfere with the other ideas of time; "Party time" is a political stance rather than socio-philosophical concept. While progress in the center and on the margins is uneven, the developmental drawbacks of the outskirts are "compensated" by their celebration as the keeper of traditions, also viewed as an aspect of the relationship between continuity and change.

Chapter Four discusses the relationship between time and space in terms of spatiotemporal oscillation. Harms argues that "[u]ltimately, the power of spatiotemporal oscillation depends not so much on expressing distinctly rural or urban time orientation but on the ability to move, according to contingent social circumstances, between states" (p. 124). He further considers the concepts of labor and leisure in the negotiation of spatiotemporal oscillation. Peasant households, operating their businesses out of their homes, can achieve unity of spatiotemporal forms as the spaces of labor and leisure are shared. But it is impossible for anyone else. Harms ties the idea of spatiotemporal oscillation to the strategies people use to reproduce themselves as ideal social persons.

Chapter Five considers the role of road as social space for encounter and interaction among the people. Harms discriminates between the role of roads in the city and in the countryside. The city sees a proliferation of front-facing property, while on the outskirts front-facing property creates an approximation of the city's development—as Harms put it, "a pseudo-urban corridor of services, modern shops, and homes" (p. 164). However, the backside remains countryside. It is around roads that communal life often forms. That translates not only into social interactions in numerous cafes located along the roads but also into the public performance of rituals. The road also represents a transformation of the outskirts as it changes the connection between the inner and the outer city, and the way of life in the latter.

Chapter Six details complexities of the very existence of a rural entity in a socialist society. Even though the revolution in Vietnam was carried out in the name of the peasantry, peasants were and still are considered as underdeveloped. According to Harms, Vietnamese urbanization texts suggest that Vietnamese history should move from a rural (underdeveloped) society to an urban (developed) one. In this chapter, Harms considers the attractions and ills of city life for the inhabitants of the outskirts. Following the history of Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City during different historical periods, the author shows the complexity of the mutual perceptions in the center and on the edges.

In his Conclusion, Harms stresses that Hóc Môn "embodies the uncomfortable position of sitting between" socialism and capitalism, between the center and margins (p. 237).

The book is very successful in creating a portrait of the Hóc Môn community and in tracing

the changes connected to its proximity to Ho Chi Minh City. It is somewhat short on analysis of whether or not the Hóc Môn community exerted any significant influence on the city.

Another point that perhaps deserves a clearer explanation or deeper exploration and is somewhat interconnected with the above observation lies in the very title of the book *Saigon's Edge: On the Margins of Ho Chi Minh City*. Given that the author mainly relates the situation in Hóc Môn during the modern period dwelling very little on the "Saigon period" and that the book is largely based on synchronic anthropological research rather than historical investigation, what role does the shift from "Saigon" to "Ho Chi Minh City" play in his analysis and in the title of the book?

Harms states that he has "attempted to use the tools of a native discourse in order to unravel that discourse and show what it reveals, what it masks, and also what it does" (p. 238). However, it is hard to imagine that those same people living on the fringes he described with palpable sympathy using the tools of a native discourse would be able to fully or even partially grasp this study created in a highly academic and urban theoretical register, both in concept and in vocabulary. Thus, Harms' warm and, in my opinion, poetic study of Hóc Môn cannot be heard by the people of Hóc Môn or of any other outer-cities for that matter, but it will resound among specialists of Vietnam and cultural anthropology and sociology to whom it will be very useful.

Olga Dror
Department of History, Texas A & M University

Redeeming REDD: Policies, Incentives and Social Feasibility for Avoided Deforestation

Michael I. Brown
London: Routledge and New York: Earthscan, 2013, xii+330p.

In September 2013 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN global authority on climate change, presented its fifth assessment report. Its main message is that more solid evidence proves that human caused emission of greenhouse gasses (GHG) indeed drives climate change. Global average temperatures will likely rise with more than 2°C. Global weather patterns will change, causing more severe droughts in dry regions and more severe storms and downpours in wet regions, for instance in the typhoon prone region of Southeast and East Asia.

Experts have realized that forests can and should be considered in climate-change mitigation efforts. According to FAO (2011; 2012), forests worldwide contain 650 billion tons of carbon and absorb about a quarter of carbon that is emitted into the world's atmosphere. Indonesia and other countries of mainland Southeast Asia have vast forest stocks or extensive peat lands that can significantly influence future climate change, depending on how they are being managed. To lose